

# RESOURCES

News about nature, history and horticulture in Fairfax County

Volume 3, No. 1 Fall 2002



## Following the Civil War Trails



By Jane Scully, ResOURCES Editor

**T**he Civil War will be fought again September 22 through 26 as public television re-airs the highly regarded Ken Burns series, "The Civil War." Two million people are expected to participate. And this time, Virginia is ready for the war.

In a state where more than 60 percent of that bloody war was waged, the names and places are very real to its people. As early as the 1920s, the state's Department of Transportation had installed roadside historical markers along routes where armies advanced or retreated and where skirmishes were waged. Yet these places were not connected in any way to give a larger or more connected picture to help the visitor follow the trails of the troops and battles.

Enter the Virginia Civil War Trails, begun as a coalition of jurisdictions, historians, marketing specialists and the National Park Service. With a grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in 1995, they were charged with updating the historic markers and improving the visitor experience at Civil War sites. The group worked together to create a 20-stop driving tour that follows Lee's Retreat in 1865 through six counties from Petersburg to Appomattox. A detailed brochure map and a series of directional signs led tourists to historical

► **Civil War Trails** continued on page 10

## Who's HOO in the World of Owls

By P.J. Dunn, Huntley Meadows Park Volunteer Naturalist

**I**magine for a moment that you are deep in the woods on a dark, chilly night. The only sounds are the rustling of the wind through the trees and the soft crunching of the leaves under your feet as you walk the trail. You are by yourself, but you are not alone. Off in the distance you hear a sound. You stop to listen. First, only silence. Then, you hear it again. A soft whinnying, not unlike a horse. It repeats itself a few times, then is followed by a long whistled trill on one pitch. You have just heard the call of the Eastern screech owl.

The Eastern screech owl is one of three owls common to our area. The other two are the great-horned owl and the barred owl. The screech owl is the smallest of them all, standing only 7 to 10 inches tall. It is the owl most likely to be seen near houses, as its favored habitat is wood edges and shade trees. Sitting perched on a branch, the owl vigilantly scans the

ground for food. Its diet consists mainly of small rodents and insects.

The Eastern screech owl breeds in the late winter and early spring, nesting in tree cavities. She will sit on her four to five eggs for just under a month before they hatch into down-covered chicks in the late spring. The owlets will become a foxy red or a shadowy gray when grown.

Perhaps the best known of our three resident owls is the barred owl, sometimes referred to as the "hoot-owl," whose call is the loudest of the three. Its most commonly heard call is two groups of accented hoots: hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-aw. Or, as it is sometimes described, "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?" This fairly large owl (17 to 24 inches tall) is usually found not too far from water. Preferring moist woods or swampy areas, it will find

► **World of Owls** continued on page 10

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## Where's the Beef?

All manner of provisioning was important during the fall at Sully Historic Site during the 18th century. Late fall was the perfect time for hunting and trapping. On Sunday, November 17, learn about the 18th century techniques used to provide meat for the family. Discover the diet and hunting activities of the enslaved community at the slave quarter. Archaeological excavations reveal bones such as pig, squirrel, cow and chicken at the site. At the house, you will see methods and recipes used to prepare and dress these foods. The program and tour of the house are \$5 for adults, \$4 for students and \$3 for seniors and children. Call Sully at 703-437-1794 for more information.

## "It was a dark and spooky night..."

Come gather round the campfire and hear the strange tales of Hidden Pond's spooky past on Friday, October 25, from 7 to 9 at night. Toast s'mores over the cozy fire and listen to the sounds of the night life of the forest around you. Then take a walk in the nocturnal forest to search for any animals that may be nearby. Reservations are required for \$3 per person. Call 703-451-9588.

## Van Tours Galore!

Many readers have asked about van tours. Here are some you especially might enjoy:

**Cape Henlopen Birding:** For adults, Saturday, September 28 from 7 am to 7 pm, from Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Visit the convergence of the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Ocean at the peak of the raptor migration. See shore, sea and songbirds in local habitat. Reservations and \$20 prepayment required by September 23. Call 703-941-1065 for what to bring and appropriate clothing.

**Fall Colors at Sky Meadows:** For adults, Tuesday, October 22 from 9 am to 3 pm, from Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Travel west to view bright fall leaf colors, red-headed woodpeckers and fox squirrels. Optional strenuous hike to overlook. Tour historic Mt. Bleak house. Reservations required by October 16. Call 703-941-1065 for reservations and \$10 prepayment, and to find out what to bring and to wear.

**Civil War Van Tour:** Sunday, October 27 from 10 am to 4 pm, from Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Walney. Visit skirmish sites in Fairfax and neighboring counties, on into Snicker's Gap in West Virginia. Learn about the exploits of Mosby's Rangers and the many other soldiers who operated in No-Man's Land during the war. Reservations and prepayment of \$15 required by October 24. Call 703-631-0013.

**Hawk Mountain:** For adults, Friday, November 8, from 8 am to 5 pm, from Riverbend Visitor Center. Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania is one of the premier raptor migration sites in the east. Bring a cushion to sit on boulders and watch for eagles, buteos and accipiters as they kettle overhead on their way south. Look for songbirds during a short hike on the mountain. Reservations and prepayment of \$15 are required by November 1. Call 703-759-9018.

# Fantastic Fall

## Civil War Encampment

Come join the Virginia 49th Infantry at a Civil War encampment on the grounds of Colvin Run Mill. On Sunday, September 29, a free program features reenactors who will hold period drill and firing demonstrations throughout the day from noon to 4 pm. They will also share with you what goes on in their daily lives and those of their families as they camped making themselves ready for the many skirmishes and battles that occurred so close by during the Civil War. For more information, call Colvin Run Mill at 703-759-2771.

## New on our web site!

Have you visited our web site recently? It's called *ResOURces Online* at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources). It's a great resource itself and also works to complement the print publication.

Web site content is always being added. This month we have birdseed sale order forms and tips on what different birds eat and how to select bird feeders. There's an article about fall on the farm, what a farmer dreads—and hopes for. And this month we're also doing a photo essay of a barn raising at Frying Pan Park. We'll also keep you up to date on sites, park shops, events—and much more!

Come check out *ResOURces Online* soon. We'll help add color to your fall!



## Everybody's Favorite Plant Sale

Here it comes! Mark your calendars for Saturday, September 21 from 10 am to 3 pm for the annual Fall Plant Sale and Garden Day at Green Spring Gardens Park. Vendors of native plants, perennials and shrubs join with The Friends of Green Spring (FROGS) to offer rare and unusual plants that will make themselves right at home in northern Virginia gardens. You can get a ton of advice from these talented folks, whether you're a beginning gardener or a seasoned veteran. Great tools and books are for sale at the Manor House and the Horticultural Center. The event is free, but the plants are very, very tempting.

## Parks Receive Accreditation!

We are delighted to announce that three of our parks have just received accreditation from the American Association of Museums. The prestigious designation was given to Sully Historic Site, Colvin Run Mill Historic Site (both reaccredited) and Green Spring Gardens Park.

In 1979 Fairfax County was the first county in the country to receive accreditation for a historic site, for both Sully and Colvin Run Mill. The new ten-year designation underlines the strong county leadership in its stewardship of public resources.

The accreditations prove once more: We have some of the finest parks in the country!

## RESOURCES

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To receive your free copy of **RESOURCES**, fill out the form on the back cover or register directly on our web site at [www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/resources.htm](http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/resources.htm).

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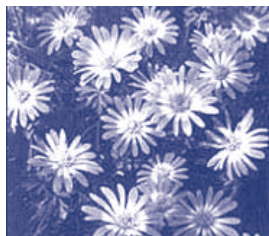
# Small Bulbs Make a Big Impact in Spring



Winter Aconite



Star of Bethlehem



Anemone Blanda

By Paula Hagan, Green Spring Virginia  
Cooperative Extension Master Gardener

This year, try adding variety to your spring garden by planting some of the smaller fall-planted bulbs. For these bulbs, timing is everything. They need to start growing their roots before cold weather. But they also need "chill time," when the temperature drops to about 40 degrees for 10 to 16 weeks, before they can bloom. In Northern Virginia, mid-October is a good planting time for fall bulbs, but they can be planted as late as November.

Because small bulbs usually produce small flowers, plant a mass of them (15, 20 or more) for best effect. For February color try some yellow-flowered winter aconite. For March, *Chionodoxa* comes in lovely shades of pink and blue. Or plant the late-blooming, low-growing pink *Oxalis*, with its beautiful shamrock-like leaves.

## SMALL BULBS FOR THE SPRING GARDEN

Bulb	Light Preference	Height	Colors	Bloom Time
Grecian Wind Flower ( <i>Anemone Blanda</i> )	Partial to half-day shade	6-8"	White, purple, and pink	early
Winter Aconite ( <i>Eranthis</i> )	Sun to partial shade*	2-3"	Yellow	early
Reticulated Iris	Sun to partial shade*	4-6"	Purple, pale blue with yellow	early
Glory of the Snow ( <i>Chionodoxa</i> )	Sun to partial shade*	4-8"	Blue, purple, pink	early
Scilla ( <i>Siberian Squill</i> )	Sun to partial shade	4-8"	Deep blue	mid-season
Puschkinia ( <i>Stripped Squill</i> )	Sun to partial shade*	6-8"	Pale blue with dark stripe	early to mid-season
Dogtoothed violet or trout lily ( <i>Erythronium</i> )**	Partial or dappled shade	3-6"	Yellow	late
Star of Bethlehem ( <i>Ornithogalum</i> )	Sun or light shade	6-12"	White	late
Wood Sorrel ( <i>Oxalis adenophylla</i> )	Sun to partial shade	4"	Lilac Pink	late

\*under deciduous trees

\*\*plant with dogtooth shape of bulb pointing UP, not on side

Note: "early" is February-March; "mid-season" is March-April; "late" is late April-May

The best time to buy bulbs at your local supplier is early September, when the best selection is available. A true bulb has all its food energy, leaves and the flower itself already packaged inside. With bulbs, bigger is better to store all that nutrition and flower. Don't buy bulbs with mold, cuts or that have already started growing two inches or more. 🌸

## TIPS FOR HEALTHY BULBS

- Most bulbs don't like a "wet basement." Choose a well-drained location.
- Match the sun exposure of the location to the sun needs of the bulb. Some bulbs such as tulips do best in full sun. Others, like daffodils, will grow in partial shade.
- To break up clay soil, improve drainage and add nutrients, mix in composted organic matter (shredded leaves, grass clippings and garden cuttings that have decomposed) and a little coarse sand.
- Store bulbs in paper bags, not plastic, in a cool, dry, ventilated place until you are ready to plant them.
- For a nice display, plant bulbs in masses, not single lines or isolated bulbs.
- To plant a large bed, dig it up to a depth of 12 inches, then mix compost into the soil to provide good nutrients and aeration for the roots.
- General rule of thumb—plant bulbs at a depth two and one-half to three times their height. For example, plant a tulip bulb that is two inches tall about five to six inches deep.
- Wear gloves to plant bulbs, especially hyacinths, which when dry have fine, needle-like crystals that will make your skin itch.
- Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer (e.g., 10-10-10, or 10% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus, 10% potassium) three times: in the fall, in the spring when bulbs first sprout and again after they flower.
- Bulbs need water in the winter, particularly during a dry winter.

After bulbs bloom, cut the spent flowers. Allow the foliage to die back naturally. Do not braid or knot the foliage. Most bulbs need at least a month after bloom for the foliage to gather nutrients through photosynthesis to store as energy for beautiful blooms next year.



# Partnership Aids Environment and Business

Two very different organizations are working together to find methods for improving natural habitat and assuring public services at the same time. The successful cooperative project has been based on major scientific research and monitoring that addresses important natural resource issues affecting Fairfax County parks and county citizens.

Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and Dominion Virginia Power are the partnering organizations. FCPA, which has numerous power line rights-of-way running through its parks, wants to increase the amount of stable wildlife habitat in these green areas. Mowing of rights-of-way areas cuts down habitats indiscriminately and creates constantly changing vegetative conditions. These conditions do not allow for the development of stable, sustainable plant communities upon which wildlife communities depend.

Dominion Virginia Power, however, needs to assure a constant flow of power to its customers. They need to keep trees from growing up into its power lines and shorting out the high-voltage transmission lines that carry the power. By controlling tree growth in its rights-of-way and removing much of the woody growth under the lines, the company can keep maintenance costs down and improve service reliability. Mowing seemed their only alternative.

The need to address the rights-of-way issues brought together Dominion Power forester Robert Chenowith and Park Authority natural resource manager Todd Bolton. They joined their technical expertise to study the mass of respected research for an answer, especially the rights-of-way research by Dr. William Bramble and Dr. William Byrnes. After this study, they became convinced that certain herbicides in diluted doses were their best bet.



*Todd Bolton, FCPA natural resource manager, looks at wildlife cover that now flourishes under power lines.*

Yet for the past two decades, public concerns about the use of herbicides have been strong. They include questions about effects on birds and butterflies and their offspring, about the insects and other life in the area and about possible runoff effects of such chemicals. Other concerns involve monitoring, repeat use and soil and water safety.

Chenowith and Bolton were equally concerned with finding the best and most habitat-friendly materials for their project. They tested a number of possible herbicides at different dilution levels. Finally, they proposed using a class of chemicals that includes fosamine ammonium, an herbicide with a half-life of from less than one day to five days.

This herbicide is rapidly absorbed by the target plant and is quickly metabolized in tolerant species. It is rapidly decomposed by

soil microorganisms. The material is therefore not likely to run off into surface waters or leach into subterranean aquifers. Many tests of the EPA-approved product had been conducted in test plots.

With this information in hand, Chenowith and Bolton submitted a plan to the Park Authority Board to allow them to test the herbicide program on Dominion rights-of-way inside a county park. After the Board had been fully informed of the herbicides' chemistry and the tests that had been conducted, they gave their permission to move ahead. The site that was chosen was Wakefield Park, one of the area's most popular recreational areas. The first use of the herbicide was in summer 2001.

Today, one year later, the control rate for undesirable species appears to be around 70 to 80 percent, although analysis is not yet complete. Effectiveness is determined by using before-and-after counts of stems in the demonstration areas. If the results continue to be as positive, the plan is to continue the herbicide program that, in five years, will require minimal periodic application.

Bolton suggests that working with Dominion has opened new doors for the Park Authority with local officials, some of whom had trouble relating to the county's ecosystem problems but fully understood the importance of maintaining power stability. The Wakefield work has provided an example of how specific herbicides can be safe and effective and at the same time create a positive resolution for business concerns.

Ten years ago such a feat would have been out of reach. But today Dominion enjoys a solid cooperative relationship with the FCPA. Their new program to keep power lines clear has also worked to increase habitat for wild turkeys, songbirds, foxes and even salamanders, who can now call the power company's rights-of-way a safe haven. 🍁

# Digging for History at Hunter Hacor

## *...and Finding Hard Times in a Hard Land*

By Cecile Glendening, Research Archaeologist

“My miserable soil has too long resisted my anxious exertions to make something.” Such was the lament of Gustavus Scott, a farmer in western Fairfax County in the early 1800s. His farm, Mulberry Hill, along with many others, is now part of the Hunter Hacor property, a 1,700-acre tract acquired by the Fairfax County Park Authority located along the Loudoun/Fairfax border. Scott’s tales of woe seem to have followed the property for the next 200 years.

The Park Authority’s Cultural Resource Protection group is currently researching the Hunter Hacor tract to identify sites where archaeological exploration might provide physical evidence of historic and cultural value. The research includes discovering who has lived on the property and when, what kind of activities took place in the area and what structures might have existed.

For this type of background research, newspaper articles and court records provide a wealth of detail not often found in land deeds, which record only who owned the land rather than who lived there. Information from a variety of sources allows us to dig out the stories and lives of those who used the land. That information is then used by archaeologists to locate potential field sites and determine their significance for site preservation or research and subsequent excavation.

In 1820 real estate tax records began to list the values of buildings as well as land, giving the researcher confirmation that buildings existed and the nature of those buildings on the property. Changes to these values through the years are clues that point to the owner expanding a house, adding a barn or other changes. Personal property tax records offer insights into the value of a person’s furniture, whether they owned slaves, as well as items like watches or clocks. Ownership of slaves leads archeologists to look for slave cabins and work areas.

Records filed with court cases often contain letters and other documents that allow glimpses into the sometimes very personal details of someone’s life. In a letter written by Gustavus Scott in 1817 to a gentleman in Fauquier County concerning Scott’s debts, he said, “...one reason for not grinding [his wheat] directly is, that I sold my waggon ...and am too poor to buy one just now and too proud to borrow.

A waggon and team could not be hired hereabouts upon any terms.... My miserable soil has too long resisted my anxious exertions to make something, I must and will quit it for one that will not so often put me to the blush.”

In 1854, a Chancery Court allotted a 195-acre parcel (now contained in the Hunter Hacor tract) to John H. Daniel. He had money problems from the start, and a lawsuit between John Daniel and Alexander Grigsby, a prominent area merchant, contains the testimony of Grigsby that, “...there was no house on Daniel’s land fit to live on. ...(T)he house had been begun, but Mrs. Daniel would not live there as it had no floors.”

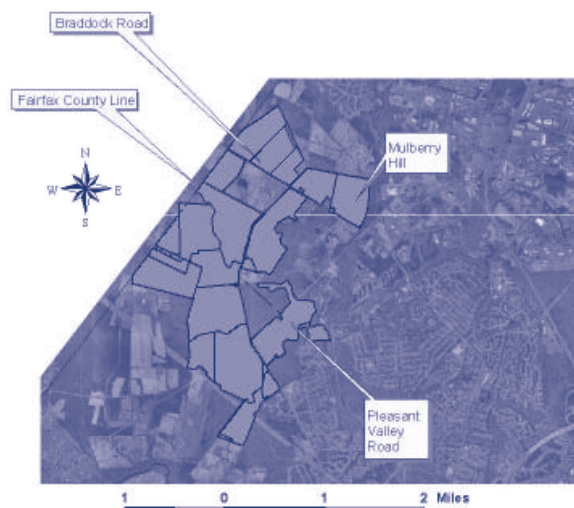
Store accounts included in the court papers show large purchases of whiskey by Mr. Daniel, as well as “1 bottle pain killer.” Daniel admitted in his testimony that he knew “...little of business matters and has been heretofore addicted to extremely intemperate habits.” One could almost sympathize with Daniel if he was trying to grow anything on his property. Most of it was, and still is, a swamp full of ticks and poison ivy.

Life in the area continued to be hard during the 20th century. In 1909, Konrad Korzendorfer, who was farming part of the old Mulberry Hill tract, was running his sawmill when he caught his foot in the carriage, breaking his leg. The next Sunday lightning struck his barn, killing a horse and extensively damaging the barn. On the following Tuesday, Korzendorfer’s sawmill caught on fire and was entirely destroyed.

The research being conducted on the Hunter Hacor tract is opening a window into the lives of the past residents who created the history of western Fairfax County. The more we discover about the everyday details of their lives, the more we appreciate the land, its cultural and historic past and the very real people who lived there. 🍂

*“I sold my waggon  
...and am too poor  
to buy another one  
just now and too  
proud to borrow.”*

– Gustavus Scott,  
1817



*Hunter Hacor Location Map*

## SEASONAL EVENTS

### *Postcards from Virginia – Sully's Annual Quilt Show*

*By Barbara Ziman, Sully Special Events Coordinator*

**S**ully Historic Site hosts the 29th annual Quilt Show and Sale on Sunday, September 8, from 10 am until 5 pm. Nearly 60 vendors will be selling antique and new American-made quilts, books, patterns, stained glass, baskets and handcrafted jewelry. Several of our long-time talented vendors call this their best show of the year! The theme for this year's show is "Postcards from Virginia."



The theme honors the beautiful quilt designed as the show's door prize by The Hayfield Country Quilters that depicts scenes from Virginia created in redwork embroidery. The quilt won second place at the prestigious Woodlawn

Plantation show, a rare achievement for a group project.

The Quilt exhibit inside the 1794 house reflects our "Postcards from Virginia" theme, featuring quilts made in Virginia or having a Virginia motif. The door prize quilt, of course, is the central piece. Kathryn Gray at the Finishing Touch quilted our door prize and the fabrics are from Total Crafts in Burke.

Thanks to the generosity of our fine community neighbors, all materials and work have been donated again this year.

On show day, Northern Virginia Quilters Unlimited will provide demonstrations and talks on quilting. This knowledgeable local group has provided Sully with quality information and instruction on applique techniques, hand quilting, memory quilts, jackets and vests, and redwork embroidery.

The show also provides a wonderful opportunity to explore your own history. Bring your family heirloom or any quilt you would like to know more about for an expert oral appraisal. Appraisals are \$5 per quilt with a limit of two.

Sully's living history volunteers will demonstrate period techniques for spinning, weaving and sewing. Children can try their hand at sewing a quilt square under the direction of our talented volunteers.

One of the highlights of the quilt show is always the music. The Moonlighters blues band returns this year to delight our audience with their great sound that keeps visitors' toes tapping. The Fairfax Symphony Woodwind Ensemble offers a light and airy sound perfect for an outdoor afternoon and The Fairfax Symphony German Band will get everybody in the Oktoberfest mood.

Admission prices are \$7 for adults, \$6 for seniors and \$4 for children. There is free parking and fun for the whole family in our beautiful historic park setting. 🍁

### **AMAZING MAIZE MAZE**

*By Todd Brown, Frying Pan Park Farm Manager*

**F**rying Pan Park's Harvest and Fun Days will take place on September 28 and October 19 this year, from 10 am to 4 pm. The show encourages visitors to take part in many of these techniques for harvesting corn. Visitors can also find their way through our corn and hay maze, planted especially for fall celebrations, and take a hayride with our draft horses pulling them around the fields. A petting zoo and apple pressing are also planned for the Days, along with a lot of other kids' games and fun. There is a \$5 per person charge.

The corn and hay maze will also be open to groups of 10 or more people from September 3 to November 3. The cost is \$2 per person in the group. For reservations, please call 703-437-9101.

So come join us to learn more about the crucial role corn plays on the farm and find out why you sometimes find farmers standing out in the field looking up at the sky. Discover why 'most every farmer has worry lines (hint: see story on our website at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources)). Help us bring in a good harvest to feed the farm animals throughout the winter! 🍁



*Come for a hayride!*



## The Very Best Bird Seed for Your Feathered Friends

By Suzanne Holland, Naturalist at Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Enjoying birds can be as easy, and as complicated, as selecting the right seed and feeders for your backyard. To guarantee the availability of healthy seed, the Fairfax County Park Authority's Resource Management Division holds an annual bird-seed sale of 11 different high-quality seed and seed mixes to attract different kinds of birds. Bag sizes differ to meet your needs. The seed is not available commercially.

Orders can be placed from September 1 through October 18. You then pick up your order on November 2 and 3 at one of three county locations. To receive an order form, contact Hidden Pond Nature Center at 703-451-9588 or pick one up at your local nature center. An even easier way to order is simply to download an order form from the Park Authority's web site at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks) and click on the bird-seed sale icon. The pick-up sites and return mailing address are included on the form.

*Don't Miss the 2002  
Best Bird Seed Sale  
and Benefit!*

*Interested in getting some  
"cheep" thrills for a song?  
Local residents are  
increasingly looking to  
lure the "A" list of birds  
to their backyards to enjoy  
the color, song and  
antics of a wide range of  
year-round and migrating  
species. Watching the  
ever-changing world  
of birds is one of the  
major benefits of  
back-yard bird feeding.*

Proceeds from the bird-seed sale are a main source of support for the education programs of the Park Authority's Resource Management Division and the Raptor Society

of Metropolitan Washington. (Yes, sometimes a hawk will visit your diner without so much as an invitation!) In tight budget times for the parks, bird-seed sale income is even more important.

For more on feeding and providing for our feathered friends, see Suzanne Holland's feature story on the whys and hows of feeding your birds. Go to [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources) to read her timely suggestions as we head into the colder months. 🍂



## Time In Our Hands

By Jim Pomeroy, Manager of Hidden Pond Nature Center

For many people, picking up a rock is a pleasant experience. Heft, color, texture, temperature all combine to give a rock interest. Children love to collect rock treasures, before they become self-conscious about that kind of behavior. But perhaps there is more to our affinity for rocks.

Around here, one of the rocks most likely to be picked up is quartzite. It comes in many colors, often tinged with red or gray, but usually yellow. Our quartzite began as silicon-rich sand, eroded and washed from ancient mountains perhaps a thousand million years ago. In a process that takes millions of years, water seeping through carries minerals that become deposited onto the sand grains, cementing the grains together, thus creating sandstone. If the sandstone is buried by enough successive layers of silt, sand, mud, more sand, more mud, whatever, it will be pressed several miles deep within the earth, where heat and pressure fuse the sand grains

together to form quartzite. If we break sandstone, the crack will go around the sand grains; if we break quartzite, the crack must go right through the sand grains.

Our quartzite was brought back to the surface by a process of mountain building, which of course takes many more millions of years. Mountain building can happen when continents collide, thrusting up deeply buried material. Now, quartzite is very, very tough. So tough, in fact, that after those new mountains were worn completely away, the few rocks still left, lying around our fields and stream bottoms, are often quartzite.

Of all the creatures on this planet, only humans are capable of grasping the idea of time. Or at least we think we know what time is. Although it is so difficult to define, there seems to be something about holding an old rock that helps some of us come to a feeble understanding of whatever it is that time is. 🍂

### *Help Children Discover the Resources in Our Parks*


Fall is back-to-school time for kids, which means the annual start of school programs for our parks. We need volunteers to lead history, nature and horticulture programs for school children in parks throughout the county. If you have a couple of weekday mornings a month available, consider spending it in the parks helping children explore their rich natural and cultural heritage. It's a great way to learn and help at the same time! For more information, contact Erin Chernisky in Volunteer Support Services at 703-324-8750 or visit our web site at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/volunteer](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/volunteer).

## Partake for Parks, Por Favor!

**H**elp support our hundreds of dedicated park volunteers by eating great Mexican food. Sound too good to be true? It's not!

On Thursday September 19th, Chevys Mexican restaurant in Merrifield is sponsoring a fundraising night for the Resource Management Division's Volunteer Program. The Merrifield Chevys will donate 20 percent of all revenue generated between 4 and 10 pm from customers who identify themselves to their server as supporting the Park Authority's fundraising night. That money will be donated to the Volunteer Program to help in training and recognizing our dedicated volunteers.

Anyone can participate in the fundraiser. So spread the word, gather your friends, and come to Chevys on September 19th to eat, drink, be merry, and partake for our parks!

Chevys is located in Merrifield, Virginia, at 3052 Gatehouse Plaza just off Gallows Road near the intersection with Arlington Boulevard (Route 50). Reservations or coupons are not required. (Remember to mention the Park Authority's fundraising night to your server; otherwise we won't get the 20 percent!). For more information, contact Erin Chernisky at 703-324-8750. 

## IT'S TIME TO START COMPOSTING!

*By Ed Yates, Laborer,  
E. C. Lawrence Park*

**T**he formal gardens at Walney, the estate house at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, are alive with butterfly bush, complete with butterflies drawn by the nectar of the flowers. Autumn Joy sedum is coming into flower with

its succulent leaves and long-lasting pink flowers. In the herb and kitchen gardens, crops such as lemon balm and basil, as well as corn and snap beans, are producing bountiful produce typical of what was grown there in the mid-19th century.

The success of each plant grown in these gardens depends largely upon the soil. Dirt that is rich in nutrients, that retains moisture but drains well, is ideal. The plants respond to these conditions by growing rapidly and demonstrating increased resistance to pests and diseases. Each year our job is to give them a little help.


Nothing is better to create soil than compost made on site. It is a simple process to master, and can save both a park—and the individual gardener—a great deal of time and money. It's fall, and the time to start your own compost is *now*.

The perfect compost mixture contains both carbon and nitrogen. Leaves, hay, and straw possess carbon, while aquatic weeds, grass clippings, garden trimmings and manure are rich in nitrogen. So right now, collect the last of the grass clippings and plant material

to start your own compost project. As the weeks move on, add those fall leaves with their own chemistry to your ripening mix.

To hasten the pace through which the mixture becomes dirt, chop up the gathered materials into small pieces. Pile them all together in a bin or heap, and allow nature's hardest-working organisms, decay microbes, to do most of the work. These microbes digest organic matter and transform it into humus. In the process they release elements such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen, phosphorous and sulfur into the air, elements that are critical to the plant cycle.

The pile of material should be turned or stirred periodically, and can be watered during periods of drought. A variety of bins and containers can be used to house the material. Just make sure that there are openings in the walls, allowing for adequate ventilation.

When the dirt is ready to enter the garden, the pile will have shrunk to about 20 percent of its original size. It will be black and friable, crumbling easily when squeezed. By spring you are ready to feed your garden with its own recycled produce. The rich composted material can be used on top of the soil as mulch, or incorporated into the soil itself. Then stand back! Spring flowers can't be far away! 





# CONVENIENCE IN A CAN

*By Dawn Kehrer, Assistant Historian at Colvin Run Mill*



*At Colvin Run Mill's General Store in the early 19th century, cans such as these lined the shelves.*

As you open that can of olives from Greece, black beans from Mexico or even a can of soup from Michigan, you can thank Napoleon Bonaparte.

That Napoleon Bonaparte, the French emperor whose military victories are legend. In 1809 he awarded a monetary prize to one Nicolas Appert for finding a method to preserve food for his troops. Napoleon knew well the old adage, "The military moves on its stomach," and having food that could move with them gave his armies a distinct advantage.

Appert's method was to seal partially cooked food in glass bottles with cork stoppers and then immerse the bottles in boiling water. His theory was, "If the food is sealed in an airtight container and the air inside is expelled and if it is sufficiently heated, the food will keep." He sent bottles of sterilized partridges, vegetables and gravy to sea with sailors for four months and ten days. All the food retained its freshness.

In England Peter Durand patented the idea of preserving food in "vessels of glass, pottery, tin or other metals or fit materials." Durand chose tin plate cans, made of iron coated with tin to prevent rusting and corrosion, because they were more durable than glass. By 1813 British army and navy leaders began using tins of canned food and explorers on extended voyages were taking them as well.

However, there were some bad results. One group of explorers, their ships trapped in the Arctic ice, finally left the ship and tried unsuccessfully to walk to safety. In 1984 scientists exhumed their bodies and discovered that they had died of acute lead poisoning from the melted lead and tin solder used to seal the food cans.

Thomas Kensett brought canning ideas with him from England when he immigrated to America. In 1812 he set up a small plant on the New York waterfront to can the first hermetically sealed oysters, meats, fruits and vegetables in the United States.

Kensett used glass jars at first but they were expensive, breakable and difficult to pack. By the mid-1800s, Kensett's son set up a small cannery for oysters and vegetables at the foot of Federal Hill in Baltimore. The city's position near the Chesapeake Bay and midway along the East Coast helped it become the "world's greatest food-canning center," a distinction it held until the 20th century.

Canned foods made survival possible when fresh food was not available. Foods such as salmon, vegetables and meat were carried by the miners of the 1849 Gold Rush and packed in wagons by pioneers opening up new territory in the west.

In the Civil War soldiers, especially those in the north, relied on canned rations. Soldiers carried milk canned by Gail Borden with them. Borden made pure, fresh milk available in a condensed form. Back on the farm, the ability to can milk allowed dairy farmers to expand their operations and reach far-away markets.

Even though the tin can was invented in the early 1800s, a can opener was not available until 1858. The earliest cans were cut around the top near the outer edge with a hammer and chisel. The first opener looked like a bent bayonet.

In the home, 19th century women were "putting food by" in glass jars. In 1858, John Landis Mason developed and patented a shoulder-seal jar with a zinc screw cap that made a better seal. In the modern home, food is still usually canned in glass jars.

Since their inception, canned and preserved foods have added to the reach of mankind. Two centuries ago, canned food aided the survival of global powers. In America, the tin can helped frontiersmen and families open the west. Then in the 20th century, canned rations went to war with American soldiers. Cans continue to be critically important in transporting nutrition to Third World countries and to areas of catastrophe.

Today Americans use 130 billion cans each year creating an 8-billion-dollar industry, according to the Can Manufacturers Institute. This "unsung hero of contemporary living" brings to our homes an incredible array of household products, out-of-season fruits and vegetables and exotic goods from other cultures that enhance our knowledge and appreciation of other cultures. 🍁



*Inside the General Store, canned articles sit in front of antique cash register.*

► **Civil War Trails** *continued on page 10*  
 markers and informative radio transmissions about the site's significance during the final days of the war.

The success of the tour created a clamor from other jurisdictions and historic land-owners that wanted trails in their own areas. With an overwhelming effort and participation from groups and individuals across Virginia, a statewide Civil War Trails (CWT) project was approved. Today, under the direction of Mitch Bowman who originally came on as a part-time employee, there are 298 sites linked by the program into five thematic trails that run through 79 cities and counties of Virginia. Eye-catching signs mark the way, and map and history brochures tell the story of each trail.

"The Virginia Civil War Trails provide structure for travelers to help them experience a sequence of events tied to the landscape," says Bowman. "It gives communities an opportunity to be part of a statewide effort for only modest investment. It allows the state to help capture visitors interested in the niche market of the Civil

War and for preservationists to actively participate in the safe-keeping of Civil War sites."

The trails cover major areas of the state, including Northern Virginia where battles and skirmishes took place during the entire war. Local sites include the large Manassas National Battlefield Park as well as smaller war sites such as Ox Hill Battlefield, Ben Lomond Manor House and the Freeman Store and Museum. There are many other sites, such as Union Mills, that are not on the CWT.

The five trails in place now are:

- ★ **Northern Virginia:** Crossroads of Conflict—from the Potomac to the Rappahannock
- ★ **Shenandoah Valley:** Avenue of Invasion for the Confederate Army to take Washington, DC
- ★ **Lee versus Grant:** the 1864 Campaign where the Union Army finally reached Richmond
- ★ **1862 Peninsula Campaign:** Civil War in Tidewater was fought through attacks by water
- ★ **Lee's Retreat:** The Final Campaigns

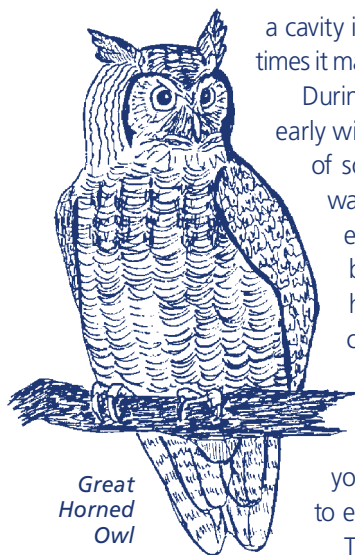
that ended with Lee's surrender at Appomattox

In Northern Virginia, we have so many sites close to us. Our area was occupied early in the War by Union troops who built many forts to protect the Federal capital. At the same time, Confederate engineers also built defense works to hold back the Union army and to protect their strategic railroad junction at Manassas. Today, we can still see these sites. We can travel along the rural roads that soldiers from both sides marched over so long ago. We can visit battlefields and skirmish sites where so much blood was shed, Union and Confederate. At this Crossroads of Conflict, we can hear the stories of civilians caught between opponents at war.

So take this wonderful opportunity to explore the places of the Civil War with Ken Burns on PBS and the Civil War Trails, which connect the stories of the War Between the States that lingers so long in our memories, our history and our imagination.

For more information on the Civil War Trails, visit their website at [www.civilwartrails.org](http://www.civilwartrails.org) or call the office toll-free at 1-800-CIVIL-WAR. 🍁

► **World of Owls** *continued on page 10*



Great  
Horned  
Owl

a cavity in a large tree to make its home. Sometimes it may even use an abandoned squirrel's nest.

During the courtship season in late fall and early winter, the barred owl can be the source of some very strange sounds. One of the ways the male and female acknowledge each other and strengthen their bond is by greeting each other with a series of hoots and monkey-like screams. This caterwauling continues throughout the courtship and early breeding season.

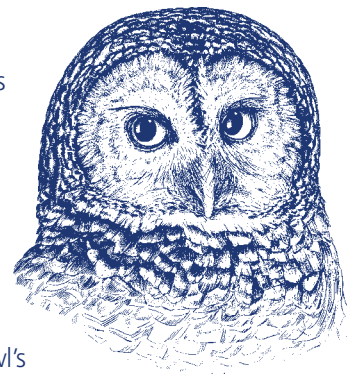
The breeding season is mid-winter to mid-spring and the two to four downy young emerge from the nest in mid-spring to early summer.

The largest of the three owls in our area is the great-horned owl. Standing 18 to 25 inches tall, it has a wingspan of 44 inches and weighs as much as three pounds, almost twice as much as the similar-sized barred owl. Feeding mostly on rodents, rabbits, and sometimes even other owls, the great-horned owl is an accomplished hunter. When it sits perched up on a branch,

no small mammal is safe from its razor-sharp talons or its hooked beak. In sharp contrast to its fierce reputation, the great-horned owl has a soft call of "hoohoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo."

Generally heard during the courtship and mating season of late fall through mid-winter, this owl's call is not the voice you would expect from such a large owl. The great-horned owl can be found in almost any habitat that has trees, preferring to make its home in an abandoned hawk's nest or crow's nest. It is the earliest nester of our three resident owls, fledging one to six young in mid- to late spring.

Now imagine yourself once again in the woods. Silently stealing down the trail, you are alert, listening. You are surrounded by silence. Then, not too far away, you hear it. Is it the whinny of a horse? Or maybe the screaming of monkeys? Perhaps it is the soft, beating of your own heart? Armed with your new-found knowledge of our resident owls, soon you will see just *WHO* is making those sounds in the night. 🍁



Barred Owl

# Oral History Reveals New Dimensions

By Barbara Naef, Former Resource Stewardship Manager

**H**ave you ever wondered what the land and life were like on places that have now been protected as parks? Often their history offers us our clearest look back at the Fairfax County of 50 or 100 years ago, or even earlier.

When the Park Authority assumes stewardship of land that is designated for park use, staff members inventory the resources located there, whether cultural, natural or horticultural. Based on that inventory, plans are developed and implemented to preserve, restore and then maintain those resources.

Equally important to this preservation effort is the collecting of oral histories and traditions of place. These records often provide a delightful third dimension to a park's individual story. One such story currently being recorded by Park Authority staff involves Lahey Lost Valley Park in Vienna. A major contributor to this oral history has lived in that area for most of his 80 years and has talked of his own experiences, as well as many of the stories he heard during his childhood.

In the 1920s, what was then the old Gunnell farm had been home to multiple generations of the Gunnell family that had first settled in Fairfax County nearly 200 years earlier. The farm extended over 45 acres. Fields of corn, wheat and soybeans stretched beyond the house, barns and farm buildings, a tenant house and the old family burial grounds.

The old house had a porch on its south side with a rocking chair. Aunt Annie sat there and watched her young nephews and their friends play baseball on the flatland near the creek between the house and the cornfields. Sometimes after services at Antioch Church, the boys would walk over to the ball field from Beulah Road.

To earn extra money, one of the nephews and his brothers thinned the corn for the Gunnell farm tenant, Mr. Ramey, who lived on the property with his family. He also taught them how to put stones on the tops of the wooden crocks that were kept in the springhouse to keep animals out of the butter and the milk they held.

Foxes sometimes did manage to get nourishment from the farm, however. When honeybees invaded the house, their hive was removed along with some plaster. The foxes found the plaster dumped into the pasture, and licked all the honey remains out of it.



*The Lahey farm in the early 1940s, looking back at the house across the small stream and fields.*

Farm snakes were ingenious, too. When the boys ventured into the old barn and chicken house, they saw a black snake curled around a post. Picking up a hoe to kill the snake, they were stopped by Mr. Ramey. He explained the snake was crushing the egg it had just ingested by wrapping itself around the post. Yes, he told them, the snake would get an occasional egg, but its real work was keeping the place clear of mice!

These reminiscences reflect the place as Richard and Carlotta Lahey saw it when they purchased the house in the late 1930s. They made the house and the land their own. They kept the fields in grain, maintained a herd of cows, stabilized the springhouse and planted flower gardens.

Now the old house, minus its porch but with its 1940s-era addition, stands in a clearing. The kitchen wing from the old house was moved and transformed into an artist studio, which sits a short distance away. Much of the original farmland acreage has been sold and developed; the remaining 22 acres with the house are now covered by forest. Deer, raccoon and birds share the park now with the foxes and snakes. The barns and farm sheds are gone; Mr. Ramey's house is gone. The springhouse is a ruin. Yet the Lahey house will remain a portal to the community's past. By hearing and re-telling the stories that comprise some of the oral history of this place, our heritage is enriched and our appreciation is made that much stronger. 🍁

*By hearing and re-telling the stories that comprise some of the oral history of this place, our heritage is enriched and our appreciation is made that much stronger.*



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**MAIL TO:** Fairfax County Park Authority

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[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.htm)

## YOUR PARKS

*Here are some of the parks  
where fall is fabulous!*

**Burke Lake Park**  
7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station  
Call 703-323-6600

**Colvin Run Mill**  
10017 Colvin Run Road  
Great Falls  
Call 703-759-2771

**Ellanor C. Lawrence Park**  
5040 Walney Road, Chantilly  
Call 703-631-0013

**Frying Pan Park**  
2709 West Ox Road, Herndon  
Call 703-437-9101

**Green Spring Gardens Park**  
4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria  
Call 703-642-5173

**Hidden Oaks Nature Center**  
7701 Royce Street, Annandale  
Call 703-941-1065

**Hidden Pond Nature Center**  
8511 Greeley Blvd., Springfield  
Call 703-451-9588

**Huntley Meadows Park**  
3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria  
Call 703-768-2525

**Lake Accotink Park**  
7500 Accotink Park Rd., Springfield  
Call 703-569-3464

**Lake Fairfax Park**  
1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston  
Call 703-471-5414

**Riverbend Park**  
8700 Potomac Hills Street  
Great Falls  
Call 703-759-9018

**Sully Historic Site**  
Sully Road, Chantilly  
Call 703-437-1794

*Need directions? More information?*  
Visit us online at: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks)

## Fall Highlights



### Pickin' and Strummin'

Fall is the perfect time to enjoy an afternoon of down-home acoustic music, performed by whoever happens by—why not you?—for these informal pick-up sessions. Held at Frying Pan Park most first and third Sunday afternoons, these acoustic jams are full of great musical camaraderie. Bring an instrument or simply sit and enjoy these free drop-in sessions from 1 to 4 pm on September 1 and 15, October 6 and 20, November 3 and 17 and December 1 and 15. Call the Frying Pan Store at 703-435-3710 for more information.



### Historic Huntley Open House

Take this rare opportunity on Sunday, October 13, to visit Historic Huntley, a Federal-style villa built in 1825. The as-yet unrestored house, set atop a hill to catch the breezes, was built for Thomson F. Mason as a family escape from their Alexandria home. The open house, sponsored by Friends of Historic Huntley, is free and many Friends will be glad to show you around the house and grounds during visitation hours of from 1 to 4 pm. Call Huntley Meadows Park at 703-768-2525 for more information.



### Watershed Clean-Up Day

On Saturday, October 19, from 9 to 11:30 in the morning, join with other community members to help out our streams and clear them from the debris of human thoughtlessness. The streams will pay you back handsomely by providing a healthier home for fish, wildlife, flowers—and all the bugs that play a large role in our streams' well-being. It's a fun event and everybody feels the better for it! Call your local nature center to join this community project and to find out more details.



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